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Effective or Ineffective: A Report on Services Provided to Incarcerated Juvenile Delinquent

Females With and Without Disabilities

Sheri L. Anderson, Ozlem Kaya, and Aysegul Oz

Indiana University

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A growing body of research has indicated that female juvenile delinquency is on the rise (Lemaster & Maniglia, 2003; Mullis, Cornille, Mullis, & Huber, 2004). To date, more adolescent females are entering juvenile correctional facilities than ever before. Although the research literature has kept up with the statistics on the number of criminal and status offences adolescent females have committed over the past ten years, the information about the services provided to adolescent female offenders during their incarceration is sparse.

Historically, juvenile correctional facilities services programs were built according to the needs of juvenile delinquent males and not for juvenile delinquent females. Most of the service programs that are being provided to adolescent females offenders during their incarceration are a direct replica of programs implemented in juvenile correctional facilities for males (Shearer, 2003). Since adolescent females and males are uniquely different in terms of their development, the services programs should be different. For instance, adolescent males and girls differ regard to depression, suicide attempts, levels of resiliency, self esteem, weapon usage, and the types of crimes they commit. Adolescent females tend to be more depressed than boys and attempt suicide more frequently than adolescent males (Loper, 2000). Miller & Trapani (1995) and Ragaglia & Gerber (2002) report that girls tend to have lower levels of resiliency and self-esteem when compared to their male counterparts. Boys are two to three times more likely to carry weapons than girls. Girls are more likely to use knives than boys as their weapons of choice. Girls are more likely to murder as a result of conflict than as part of a crime that is in progress. Also, girls are more likely than boys to kill and engage in physical fights with family members (Chesney-Lind, 1987, Sarri, 1983).

With these differences should come service programs that are designed to meet the unique needs of adolescent females and males. Since the educational, medical, and psychological needs of girls are distinctively different from boys, the need to conduct research on the effectiveness of services provided to female juvenile delinquents during their incarceration is essential. Thus, the purpose of this report is to share and evaluate the quality of services female juvenile offenders received during their incarceration.

Method

Participants

Sixty-nine female adolescent delinquents who were promoted to the release phase of their program were participants of this questionnaire. All respondents volunteered to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire did not have a demographic sheet, thus the demographic information about the participants is limited. The age range of the participants is 13 to 18 years of age. Approximately 50% of the participants had a diagnosed disability (i.e., learning disability, behavior disorder, and/or mildly mentally handicapped).

Materials

Data were collected from a seven-page student exit questionnaire that was given to each participant once she reached the release phase of her program. The exit questionnaire consisted of six categories (i.e., safety, student treatment, counseling, education, recreation, and general). The intended purpose of the questionnaire is to evaluate the services that were provided to the participants to determine their effectiveness or ineffectiveness. Each category consisted of both multiple choice and open-ended questions.

Design and Procedure

Exit questionnaires were hand delivered to the first author by the superintendent of the facility. Afterwards, quantitative responses from the questionnaires were entered into Excel and later analyzed using SPSS (a statistical software program). Qualitative responses were typed into Microsoft Word. Three copies of the qualitative responses were made and distributed to each author. Each author analyzed her data set using the Text Analysis method. Once all data were analyzed, the authors met twice a week (Mondays and Wednesdays) over a sixteen week period to compare their analysis and discuss each category and its themes until they reached 100 % agreement.

Results

The results for each of the six categories are presented in table format.

Safety

Table 1: Percentage of Yes or No responses to feeling safe at the facility

	Yes	No
Did you feel safe at this facility?	72.5%	27.5%

Table 2 : Percentage of Students Citing Each Reason They Feel Unsafe

Reasons	Percentages
Other students	27. 5%
Staff	14. 5%
Lack of medical care	7. 2%
Lack of mental health care	7. 2%

Table 2 : Percentage of Students Citing Each Reason They Feel Unsafe Cont.

Reasons	Percentages
Other	5. 8%
Self	2. 9%
<i>Note:</i> Includes only students who reported not feeling safe. Students may be counted more than once if they cited multiple reasons for not feeling safe.	

Student Treatment

Table 3: Percentage of Yes or No responses for the questions regarding student treatment

	Yes	No	Total response
Did the staff hold you accountable for your behavior while at this facility?	94.2%	2.9%	97.1%
Do you feel that you were treated fairly at this facility?	50.7%	49.3%	100%
Do you feel that your rights were violated while at	30.4%	69.6%	97.1%
Were you allowed to file a grievance?	18.8%	5.8%	24.6%

Table 4: How were they treated unfairly? (check all that apply)

Categories	Percentages
Favoritism	40.6% (28)
Racism	14.5% (10)
Too easy	13.0% (9)
Too tough	10.1% (7)
Inconsistency	8.7% (6)
Other (please specify)	8.7% (6)

Table 5 : In what area your rights were violated? (check all that apply)

Categories	Percentages
Living environment	20.3% (14)
Other (please specify)	10.1% (7)

Table 6: Areas of other rights violations

Area	Percentages
staff abuse	4.3% (3)
staff neglect	5.8 % (4)
Medical	5.8 % (4)
Mail	7.2 % (5)
living environment	20.3% (14)
other (please specify)	10.1% (7)

Counseling

Table 7: Quality of counseling services

Questions	Yes	No	Total Response
Do you feel that the counseling programs that you were in were helpful	91.3%	7.2 %	98.6%
Were the counseling programs at this facility challenging?	63.8%	36.2%	100%
Were the counseling programs at this facility interesting?	84.1%	14.5%	98.6%
Do you feel that your counseling needs were met at this facility?	85.5%	10.1%	95.7%

Education

Table 8: Quality of education programs

Questions	Yes	No	Total Response
Do you feel that the education programs that you were in were helpful?	75.4%	21.7%	97.1%
Were the education programs at this facility challenging?	47.8%	50.7%	98.6%
Were the education programs at this facility interesting?	75.4%	21.7%	97.1%
Do you feel that your educational needs were met at this facility?	75.4%	21.7%	97.1%

Recreation

Table 9: Quality of recreation programs

Questions	Yes	No	Total Response
Do you feel that the recreation programs at this facility were helpful?	79.7%	20.3%	100%
Were the recreation programs at this facility challenging?	42%	56.5%	98.6%
Were the recreation programs at this facility interesting?	82.6%	15.9%	98.6%
Do you feel that your recreation needs were met at this facility?	78.3%	21.7%	100%

General

Table 10: General Category

Questions	Yes	No	Total Response
Do you feel that the orientation process you completed when you first arrived at this facility was helpful?	68.1%	27.5%	95.7%
Do you feel that your religious and spiritual needs were met?	79.7%	15.9%	95.7%
Do you feel that your medical and dental needs were met?	65.2%	31.9%	97.1%
Do you feel that the staff (all staff, custody, counselors, administrators, educators, etc.) worked as a team to help you?	78.3%	18.8%	97.1%

Table 11: Do you feel that we were able to offer you the following opportunities? (check all that apply)

Opportunities	Percentages	Number of Students
Personal changes	84.1%	58
Changes in your relationships with family	85.5%	59
Changes in your relationships and/or choices of friends	85.5%	59
Changes in how you interact with or view your place in the community	87.0%	60
Educational growth	84.1%	58
Physical health and health awareness	62.3%	43
Spiritual growth	71.0%	49
Occupational awareness and opportunities	66.7%	46

Discussion

The present data suggest the need for change in juvenile correctional facilities for girls (JCFG) from which the questionnaire was taken regarding the services that are provided. For example, 72% of the participants coded “yes” in response to feeling safe at the facility. However, 28% of the participants did not feel safe during their incarceration. When further examining the responses of those who did not feel safe, it was stated that staff members and other incarcerated girls caused their safety to be threatened. Implications that may be gleaned from this finding are: 1) more staff development and/or inservice training regarding the nature and needs of young girls who end up in juvenile correctional facilities; 2) a zero tolerance policy should be implemented for girls who present threatening and intimidating behaviors toward other girls; and 3) punitive and intimidating behaviors by staff should be monitored and corrective measures taken as needed.

On the topic of *Student Treatment*, roughly 41% of the participants reported that they were not treated fairly during their incarceration because of “staff favoritism” towards certain girls. Approximately 15% accounted for favoritism on the basis of race. That is, 15% of the participants perceived favoritism was the direct result of racism. An implication of this finding is the need for a formal assessment of the treatment of girls by staff with particular emphasis on what role, if any, racist treatment factors into staff behaviors. Any treatment imposed by staff on girls that is not in line with the mission, best practices, and scope of the facility should not be tolerated.

Of all the programs offered at the facility, *counseling* was considered to be the most favorable. Participants believed that counseling produced life changing results. For example, many of the participants alluded to having a better understanding of themselves and others, as

well as being able to cope with their personal problems in a more efficient manner as a result of the counseling services they received. Below are statements participants made regarding the benefit of counseling:

"Counseling taught me to stay away from negative people and situations."
 "Thinking for a Change [a program that is within the counseling program], it helped me learn to deal with many problems."
 "Group counseling was a good experience to learn new things and assisted me in getting along well with their peers."
 "The groups [counseling], because they helped us think."
 "The treatment groups [counseling], they helped with any issue you [we] may have [had]."

An inference that may be drawn from the data on counseling is that the program proved beneficial for the girls, particularly "Thinking for a Change," as it was mentioned often by participants. Counseling programs at JCFFG should be strong and up-to-date given that they appear to be critical in assisting incarcerated juvenile delinquent females in achieving life-long strategies for change. Administrators should invest in and commit to maintaining strong counseling programs to reduce recidivism and strengthen positive outcomes for incarcerated juvenile delinquent females.

In reference to the *Education* programs, the majority of the participants reported positive outcomes (i.e., learned interesting and helpful information, and their needs were met). On the other hand, over half of the participants reported that the programs were not challenging. One may deduce from this finding that school curriculum should be re-examined and modified so as to maintain student interest, enhance rigor, increase critical thinking skills, and address state benchmarks in the content areas. Perhaps workshops that focus on teaching strategies that may make the classroom more applicable to hands-on activities and more challenging should be explored.

With regard to the most helpful and least helpful educational program at the facility, the majority of the participants stated that the Math and GED programs were most helpful because they found them challenging and useful later on in their lives. Inferences that may be drawn from this finding are 1) teachers in JCFFG need to plan lessons so that the skills learned are skills that students can connect to their daily lives, and 2) teachers in JCFFG need to use instructional strategies that are thought provoking and stimulating so that students may feel they are being challenged.

On the other hand, nine participants stated that none of the education programs were helpful, while seven students reported that the English program was not beneficial. This finding suggests that not all students see the benefit of the educational program as it is presently implemented. Thus, further assessment of the effectiveness of the curriculum at meeting the needs of the students is warranted.

On the topic of the effectiveness of the current curriculum at the facility, participants suggested that the curriculum should be more diverse. They suggested that adding more diverse classes (refer to this question in the *Educational* section) would make for more well-rounded individuals. One may glean the following after examining the responses, if current curriculums at JCFFG are not going beyond “*the basics*,” administrators should explore other ways with the department of corrections to expand and modify current offerings in a manner that permit JCFFG residents to compete nationally.

Information from the *Recreation* category of the questionnaire indicated that the majority of the participants believed the programs were helpful, interesting, and met their needs. However, 57% of them did not find the programs to be challenging. A possible explanation for this finding (non-challenging) could be that JCFFG needs a more intense recreational program

that is well designed and is equipped to maximize the potential of its participants. The participants expressed a desire for the recreational programs as indicated by their composite responses.

In the *General* category, various questions were asked about the participants' orientation, religious, and medical and dental experiences. Participants (83.3%) overwhelmingly reported that the aforementioned categories were helpful. Based on the responses, one may infer that the participants found comfort through religious activities and meeting with Christian people. JCFFG may want to expand the religious opportunities and increase the frequency of services as it is most appealing to incarcerated juvenile delinquent girls. One compelling statement that one of the participants shared about the religious program was: "They had [there were] many groups [church volunteers] and a lot of people accepted you no matter how [much] wrong you have [had] done." The religious program was perhaps liberating for some of the participants and should remain as a program in JCFFG.

Over one-third of the participants commented that their medical and dental needs were not met. Perhaps a quality control inquiry should be made regarding the medical and dental services provided at juvenile correctional facilities for girls to ensure that the girls receive the appropriate services.

Finally, in reference to what was most helpful and least helpful at the facility, counseling ranked number one as being most helpful. Therefore, the counseling program should continue to maintain a high quality of service. Up-to-date counseling techniques should be encouraged and the facility's budget should support continuing education activities and professional development opportunities. Among the least helpful at the facility, the participants cited staff members' unprofessional behavior, inappropriate social skills of girls within the facility (gossiping and

unkind words), and cottage seven (the seclusion cottage – girls are not allowed to interact with others in the facility until their time is served) as being an ineffective behavior modification technique. To improve in this area, the following may be beneficial: 1) confidential evaluation sheets should be handed out to each girl in the JCFFG to evaluate each staff member and provide feedback from them regarding staff treatment; 2) workshops should be mandatory for staff members and topics to be addressed should include appropriate professional behavior while at work; 3) all girls at the facility should be required to take a social skills class that focuses on manners and sensitivity toward others; and 4) the techniques used in the most restrictive cottages at JCFFG should be evaluated on a bi-annual basis to determine strengths and weaknesses and ways to improve the quality of service. According to Leone, Meisel, & Drakeford (2002) when educational programs (e.g., literacy and functional skills, special education services, vocational training, GED preparation, etc.) are designed appropriately they can serve as risk reducer factors for recidivism for female delinquents.

Limitations

The fact that only one female juvenile correctional facility was involved in this questionnaire limits ability to generalize the results. Because the participants were given the questionnaire before they were released from the facility, some of the responses may not represent what the participants truly experienced because they may have feared punitive actions might be taken against them for their candor.

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